Dear Traveller

Our Trans Asia expedition has started in Istanbul today (17 Apr) and will begin to make its way to meet you in Bishkek. This update is a long one but please ensure you read it all as it contains important information about your trip. This update is being sent to everyone starting in Bishkek which includes those finishing with our truck in Bishkek as well those travelling on to China and South East Asia on our local transport trip. So, not all sections may apply to you.

Firstly, your crew for this adventure, who have all worked for us for many years – Mark Dawson will be your Tour Leader and Alan Lloyd is your Driver whilst you are on our expedition truck in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Both are extremely experienced crew and have run many successful trips together in Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East, including our Trans Africa trips and both were crew on our 2017 Trans Asia expedition. They are great guys and make a fantastic team! For those travelling beyond Kyrgyzstan, you will be met in China by another of our top Tour Leaders, Alexis. Having led truck trips and small group adventures on all 3 continents that we operate in over several years, Alexis is hugely experienced. She has previously run our Xi’an to Singapore trip and also has travelled extensively in the region on her personal travels.

***Actions to take now:***

* Those travelling through China: **Email us a scan of your China visa**
* Everyone: **Check other countries on your trip to see if you require a visa (*please see previous update 1 on the*** [***Trip Downloads page***](https://www.oasisoverland.co.uk/trip-downloads)***)***

**Bishkek – change of starting hotel**

Unfortunately, the Interhouse has not been able to accommodate us and so we will now meet at the Apple Hostel:

***Apple Hostel Bishkek***

***Address :*** *Chymkentskaya 1B, Bishkek 720030, Kyrgyzstan*

***Phone :****+ 996 553 280 881*

You can book pre-trip accommodation through [Hostelworld](https://www.hostelworld.com/st/hostels/p/88330/apple-hostel-bishkek/?source=ppc_gooads_nonbrand_dsk_dsa_pn_en_ascatchall&network=g&campaign_id=20792433326&adgroup_id=154477418303&criteria_id=dsa-443313842330&creative_id=681643529245&location_physical_id=1006988&location_interest_id=1009827&adposition&uniqueclickID=15802980758811390220&sub_keyword&sub_ad&sub_publisher=ADW&gclsrc=aw.ds&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw_LOwBhBFEiwAmSEQAVxMfpi3i-1lW-1Q7g7FEArEXXCtOOjJPe4DJjy9iP-Ir807NtiWDhoC0m8QAvD_BwE) or [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com/hotel/kg/bishkek-b-and-b.en-gb.html)

Mark and Al will be at the Apple Hostel on 18th June. If you need to contact Mark once you are in Bishkek, you can Whatsapp him on +61417867219. Please remember to tell him who you are!

Our UK 24 hour emergency number if you can’t reach him is +44 203 633 3041.

**China visa**

We hope you are all getting on ok with your China visa applications. If you have any questions about how to fill in the form, just let us know. When you have your visa, please send us a colour scan/photo of it. We will need this in order to apply for your Tibet permit.

If you already have this visa from a previous visit, please send us a colour scan/photo. If it is in an old passport that you’re not using for travelling, please also send a colour scan of the old passport. ***You must bring this old passport with you on the trip.***

**Tents and personal luggage**

The general plan whilst you are with the truck is for 2 people to share a 3 person dome tent. However, you are welcome to bring your own tent if you wish (meaning you don't need to share if you don’t want to). Please do let us know if you will be doing this. If you do bring your own, you will be responsible for it throughout the trip (so if it needs repairs or replacing during the trip, you’ll be responsible for that, as we may not have had enough spares for you). Your Tour Leader will of course assist with sourcing repairs or a new tent for you if it does come to that.

Please note that although the truck is roomy with lots of storage areas, there is a limit to space for your personal luggage and we will be full with food stocks as well as all the kitchen equipment, spare parts & tools etc.  So, 80 litre backpacks and holdalls are the best form of carrying your luggage which will be stored in lockers, along with a small day pack (40ltr max). Backpacks and holdalls that have a rigid frame as well as suitcases are impractical on the truck, will not fit in your locker, and should not be brought. If you bring excess luggage above the recommended amount then you will need to post it home from your joining city.

Please remember that if you are travelling into China and beyond, we are not with the truck anymore and you will be carrying your own luggage between hotels, train stations, transfer vehicles etc. So, you need to make sure you only bring what you are comfortable carrying yourself for a walk of at least say 30mins (it would be very rare that would be required for so long, but there may be some places it is necessary, potentially at the Kyrgyzstan/China border for example).

If you bring your own tent and are carrying on into China and beyond (when we leave the truck behind and continue with local transport), then as we do not plan for the truck to return to the UK this winter (i.e. we can’t bring tents back to the UK for you), you have a couple of choices...

* Continue carrying your tent with you, potentially to post home at a later date from a city in China
* Leave the tent on the truck. We will keep it as a backup for use by other travellers if needed until we get to a suitable place on our route where we can donate it to a worthy cause (eg. a local family or school that we may stay with or pass by).

**Dietary Requirements** (eg.Vegetarians / Vegans / Coeliacs / Gluten & Lactose intolerance etc.)

We will do our best to help facilitate dietary requirements or intolerances whenever possible, but also within reason. Whilst you are on the truck in Kyrgyzstan, everybody takes turns in cooking for the group as part of a small cook-group and while it is perfectly possible and normal to cook for both vegetarian and meat eaters, catering for more than that split is difficult.

In general, in the past we have found that vegans have really struggled with the available food options at times, particularly in Central Asia.

If there is anything in particular you require in your diet or because of an allergy or intolerance, or would miss from home, it would be best to bring these with you, as these cannot be purchased with normal Local Payment funds due to the high cost of these specialised and often imported foods. This includes things like gluten free pastas. Additionally, you may be able to find items like this when we get to big towns or cities.

Because we will be cooking communally in a shared outdoor kitchen, it is hard, if not impossible, to prevent against some cross contamination. So, if you have severe allergies to certain food products you must tell us as soon as possible so that we can consider the implications and advise you further.

It must be remembered that the variety of dishes available to vegetarians may not be the same as available to meat eaters. When eating out in local restaurants and hotels, bear in mind that vegetarianism or food allergies / intolerances, are still not widely known about or understood by many local people. Eg. vegetarians may be offered or served fish or chicken in error. Most large towns and cities, or areas used to tourists, will often have more choice but please be aware that it will probably not be as varied as you are used to when eating out at home.

A lot of meals in South East Asia are cooked using nut oil. If you are allergic to nuts, it is a good idea to bring with you some small cards with information about your allergy written in the local language. These can be easily sourced and purchased online.

**Document copies to take with you on the expedition**

Please bring **2 colour photocopies of your passport ID pages** to give to your tour leader. These are sometimes required by hotels or at borders.

It’s also a good idea to have a digital copy of your passport and passport photo, along with a copy of your vaccination certificates, including Covid. We would also suggest you take a paper copy of your passport and travel insurance and some spare passport photos. Those travelling on to South East Asia will need these digital and hard copies for visa applications (see further details below).

**Local Payment**

Your tour leader will collect your Local Payment on day one of your trip. Please remember that this must be paid in US$ Dollars **cash only**. Make sure that all your notes are in good condition. Old, torn or marked notes are often refused by the banks and we will therefore be unable to accept them either. Please also note a change to our request regarding the size of denominations: **it is preferable if you can bring these in larger denominations, e.g. US$50 and US$100 notes**. Also make sure they are dated post 2013 and do not have a serial number starting with CB.

**Passenger Liability Insurance**

As a company we do our best to have the best possible level of insurance in place to protect our travellers and our operations. That includes a comprehensive tour operators liability insurance policy which protects all of our trips. We also try to obtain passenger liability insurance to cover our liability for your time on our vehicle itself in Kyrgyzstan, including any accidents. However, as we make clear in our booking conditions, this type of insurance is not always available or adequate in some countries.

We have done extensive research over the last couple of years through insurance companies and brokers both here in the UK and in several different countries, and unfortunately the situation is that there simply is not any passenger liability insurance cover available at all now for us to purchase in advance for many of our routes. The main policy that used to provide cover for overland companies like us before Covid is simply not available anymore. We attempt to purchase insurance at each border we cross, and sometimes this is possible (albeit with a very low level of cover), but this will not be available everywhere. As a responsible operator we wanted to bring this to your attention before the trip starts.

**Travel Insurance and Government Travel Advice**

As previously mentioned in our first email, the British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) as well as governments of other countries aim to provide advice and security information for their citizens and this advice could affect your travel insurance policy. For example, if the FCDO is advising against ‘all or non essential travel’ to a particular country, your travel insurance may not cover you for travel through that country or a specific area of a country highlighted by the FCDO.

Please remember to check that your personal travel insurance is valid for travel through each and every country on the expedition.   Please also check the **cover will continue after you have been through any countries en route that currently have travel restrictions in place.**  We have been informed that some travel insurance companies will void a policy if you go against any of the British FCDO advice.

**Travel insurance that includes cover for areas the FCDO advises against travel to**

Currently, a small area of Thailand is the only place on our route that the FCDO has a travel advisory for (against all but essential travel – see below).

If you already have travel insurance and it doesn’t cover areas with travel advisories in place, SafetyWing’s Nomad Insurance can offer a policy for your time in each of them.  As these areas can change at short notice, you can take out this cover during the trip, as and when needed.  You will need to create an account on the [SafetyWing Nomad Insurance website](https://safetywing.com/nomad-insurance) and purchase a policy for a minimum of 5 days each time.

If you haven’t yet purchased a travel insurance policy for your trip, or wish to cancel and change your existing policy, you can also get cover through Safety Wing Insurance for the whole trip. Their insurance is specifically designed for long-stay travellers and digital nomads, so can work well (and be cost effective) for a trip like this, though the level of coverage (payout amounts) are not as high as other insurance providers. Again, you can arrange this online through their website.  Please note that they do not include cover for cancellation, for example, if you incurred cancellation fees because you cancelled your trip due to illness.

As always, and whichever insurance policy you take out, please read the policy carefully – it’s always a long read with a lot of small print but it’s important and your responsibility to know what you are covered for and that it will be adequate for the trip you are undertaking.

Every safe and reasonable effort will be made by us to drive all the way (with the option to fly over areas) so as to keep the continuity of the trip.  If we have no choice but to fly over a section of the trip we will endeavour to take in other places of interest if there is any time available.  While Oasis will cover all ground transport costs, we have not taken the cost of flights or you re-joining the expedition vehicle into our pricing structure.  Therefore, should a flight over any country or section become necessary the flight and re-joining costs will have to be paid for by each individual. For this reason we suggest allocating emergency funds to be kept in reserve for the entirety of the trip.

**More on Government Travel Advice**

It’s important to remember that the advice for the different countries and areas through which we operate trips is forever changing and we are constantly reviewing information as it comes to hand.  Additionally, our intended routes may change whilst on the road. Oasis Overland have been travelling through these areas for many years and have gained a lot of experience and local knowledge. We have local contacts in many areas and others who travel these routes (which may be companies and/or individuals) readily share information. We are also able to contact the FCDO directly and have in the past met with them to pass on information of areas we have travelled through.

First and foremost, the safety of our clients and crew is paramount and we take it very seriously. Things can change and our local contacts on the ground can inform us should an area become unsafe to travel through, often more quickly than the FCDO. One of the advantages of travelling overland and being flexible is that we can change our itinerary on the rare occasions this is needed. When this is not possible, then the group would need to fly over at their own expense but this is extremely rare.

The only FCDO advisory currently in place is for non-essential travel to the Southern Songkhla province of Thailand. We drive by bus through here briefly for approximately 50kms from Hat Yai to the Malaysia border.

**South East Asia Visas**

Currently,British, New Zealand, Australian and United States passport holders can apply for e-visas online in advance or at the relevant border for any necessary visas. As most visas are valid for entry between 60 and 90 days from date of issue, it is currently too early to apply for these visas.

For those travelling to South East Asia with us, please ensure you have digital copies of your passport bio page and a passport sized photo with you to upload when applying online during the trip. These copies should be good quality and clear with all information visible. Ensure your photo is recent and that you have a neutral expression and no headwear.

As an example, these are the photo requirements for the Malaysia e-visa:

1. File format using \*.JPEG/ .JPG/ .PNG in color.
2. Min. 400x600px.
3. Max. size 2Mb
4. Proper composition.

A person in a suit

Description automatically generated

The top of the head, including the hair, to the bottom of the chin must be between 50% and 60% of the image's total height. The eye height (measured from the bottom of the image to the level of the eyes) should be between 50% and 60% of the image's height.

It’s also a good idea to have some hardcopy passport photos in case they are needed.

Your Tour Leader will give you more information at a later date but in the meantime the following brief information applies to British, New Zealand, Australian and US citizens.

There are two visas that we suggest you apply for in advance, Laos and Vietnam. However it is too early to apply now or they will expire before you reach each country. **You should not apply before 31st May for these visas:**

**Laos**– All nationalities must apply for an e-visa which costs $50. The visa is valid for entry for 60 days from the date of issue.

Although you can apply up to 3 days before entering Laos, it’s advisable to apply earlier than this, preferably before you reach China as internet can be difficult there.

You can apply for your e-visa here: <https://laoevisa.gov.la/index>

**Vietnam –** British passport holders do not currently require a visa but US, Australian and New Zealand passport holders do. An e-visa costs $25 and you can apply here: <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/web/guest/trang-chu-ttdt>

The following visas will be applied for once you have started the South East Asia section of your trip:

**Cambodia** **–** E-visa or at the border costs $36

**Thailand -** No visa required for most nationalities

**Malaysia -** No visa required for most nationalities

**Indonesia** - E-visa or visa on arrival costs 500,000 rupiah (approx £25 or $35)

**Singapore -** No visa required for most nationalities